

# STILLMAN NEWSLETTER



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## WHO HOOTS FOR YOU?

-- Mark Spreyer

Imagine you've settled in your tent for the night at a tranquil forest campsite. As you are about to fall asleep, you are startled awake by a loud bird strenuously calling "hoo-hoo-to-hoo-oo, hoo-hoo-hoo-to-whooooah." Should you be lucky enough to have that experience, tip your hat to the barred owl, the classic hoot-owl.

In case you're wondering, I'm writing about barred owls because we just added one to Stillman's educational collection of permanently injured raptors. This bird came to us courtesy of Linda Breuer who runs Barnswallow, a wild bird rehabilitation and education facility. When anyone calls Stillman with an injured raptor, my recommendation is to take it to Linda.

### Owl as a Second Language

Contrary to popular opinion, many owls don't hoot. While great horned and barred owls do hoot, others screech, chatter, bark, wail, whoop, whinny, trill, howl and caterwaul.

That said, when it comes to A-No. 1, top-of-the-line hooting, you can't beat a barred owl. I should know, you see, because I'm bilingual. Yes, I can speak owl as well as human. So, if I may, here's a brief lesson on how to speak barred owl.

We'll start with the two-phrase hoot described above. Both sexes make this call which is used as a territorial advertisement.

This hooting pattern is commonly phoneticized as, "Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you-all?"



*Barred owl*

Speaking of phonetics, to properly speak owl you'll need to work on the correct pronunciation. The first two syllables of the initial phrase and the first three of the latter are clear, deliberate, and low-toned. The last two hoots run together, with a strong accent on the penultimate one. O.K., are you practicing? Once you have the two-phrase hoot down, it's time to study the caterwaul.

The caterwaul is performed by a dueting pair of owls and can last up to two minutes.

It is composed of a raucous mix of cackles, whoops, caws, laughs, hoots, and gurgles.

I clearly remember when I first heard this spine-chilling call. It sounded like a lunatic woman being run over by a truck.

### March Madness

March is the month you are most likely to hear a barred owl duet. As noted Wisconsin ornithologist Frances Hamerstrom wrote, "March is the month of madness for barred owls; the breeding season is upon them, and instead of remaining shyly in the deep woods, they take to the open country..."

### WEBSITE UPDATE

As you're reading this, our website is being updated. The new and improved version should be up and running by April. Kudos to webmaster **Meg Ewen** for her hard work. She is making the site more useful as well as colorful. Check it out at: [www.stillmanncc.org](http://www.stillmanncc.org)

## STILLMAN NATURE CENTER

33 WEST PENNY ROAD • BARRINGTON • IL • 60010 • 847-428-OWLS (6957)



While barred owls are uncommon in our immediate area, they can be found in floodplain forests that edge many of our state's larger rivers (see *Barred Owl Basics* below).

Regular readers of this newsletter might recall that Stillman has another raptor that is found in lowland forests, the red-shouldered hawk (see *Winter 2010*). So, how do they work this shared habitat?

## Night and Day Shifts

Being nocturnal, the barred owl often roosts in trees and cavities or other secluded spots during the day. By the way, animals that are active during the day, like the red-shouldered hawk, are called *diurnal*.

If a habitat hosts an abundance of prey, it will have openings for both nocturnal and diurnal raptors. In this case, the similarly-sized red-shouldered hawk hunts mice and frogs during the day that the barred owl hunts at night. Other examples of this sunrise/sunset job switch include:

NIGHT	DAY
E. Screech-owl	American Kestrel
Short-eared Owl	Northern Harrier
Long-eared Owl	Broad-winged Hawk
Great Horned Owl	Red-tailed Hawk



*Red-shouldered hawk*

Just because they work different shifts, doesn't mean these raptor counterparts always get along. Great horned owls, for example, have been known to forcibly evict red-tails from their nests.

Barred owls and red-shouldered hawks are a different story. They'll nest near one another with no apparent conflict. In rare cases, they've been known to share the same nest.

However, barred owls do not extend the olive branch to other barred owls looking to move into their territory. The resident owls will aggressively defend their turf. Not surprisingly, barred owls are famous for their site loyalty. One pair returned to the same nest for over 30 years!

## Camp OWL

Combine their site fidelity with their loquacious nature, and it is not surprising that barred owls have become forest icons.

Their woodland status was well described by Bishop Robert Hatch over fifty years ago. The Bishop spent one summer at Camp OWL located on a wooded New Hampshire hillside. The camp's name, coincidentally, was derived from the owners' initials.

The Bishop, an accomplished bird watcher, saw a wide variety of birds, including many birds of prey, during that summer. Yet, when all was said and done, it was the barred owl that ruled the woods.

*I have watched red-tailed hawks circling over the camp, and one day I saw a goshawk as I sat on the porch. But none of these birds, not even the goshawk, could match the owl. Every night the hoots rang through the forest, now from this direction, now from that, until the owl seemed the master of these woods and all the other birds mere satellites.*

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

## Barred Owl Basics

**Identifying Marks:** Wingspan 38-50 inches; length 16-24 inches. Large, dark-eyed, gray-brown owl with a barred chest and striped belly. Unlike the somewhat larger great horned owl, the barred owl lacks "horns" or feather tufts on its head.

**Habitat:** Barred owls are year-round residents in mature woods ranging from lowland swamps and bottomlands to upland forests.

**Range:** From British Columbia across to Nova Scotia south throughout the eastern United States including all of Illinois, Wisconsin, and Indiana.

**Nests:** Tree cavities as well as abandoned nests of crows, squirrels, and hawks, especially red-shouldered hawks. The presence of large trees is key.

**Diet:** Mice, chipmunks, voles, shrews, insects (i.e. beetles, crickets, moths), snakes, lizards, frogs, toads, birds, and even an occasional fish.

**Comments:** Like Stillman's other raptors, the barred owl is non-releasable. It has a damaged wing.

## END TRAILS

by Mark Spreyer

**When nature goes green.**

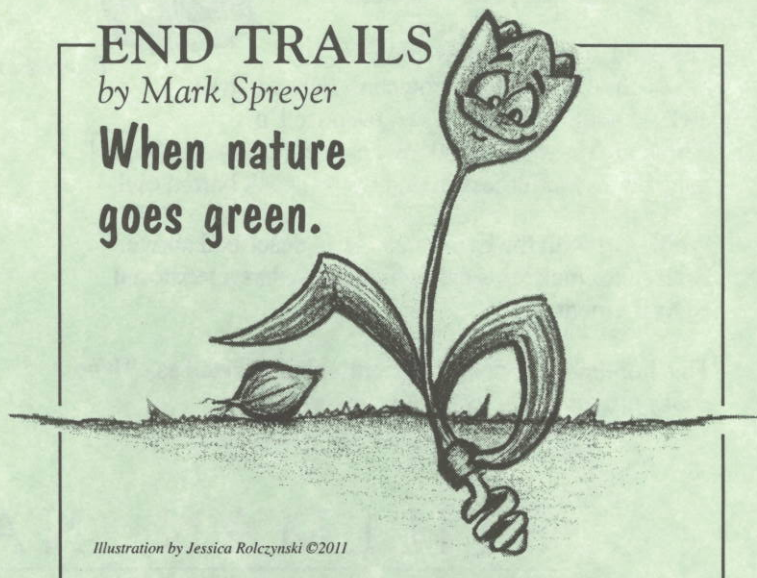


Illustration by Jessica Rolczynski ©2011



## PROGRAMS

**Program Basics:** Please call us at: 428-OWLS(6957), or e-mail at: [stillnc@wildblue.net](mailto:stillnc@wildblue.net) to make reservations for programs. Remember to include your name, phone number, and the number of people that will be attending.

If less than 5 - 10 people (varying with the activity) have called two days prior to a program, the program could be cancelled. So, don't forget to call in advance. If you discover that you are unable to attend, please cancel your reservations. This courtesy will be greatly appreciated.

### WOODCOCK WATCHES

In past years, the woodcocks have put on quite a show. Hopefully, the weather will cooperate and we'll have another good nuptial display this year. Bring you binoculars and come join the fun!

Date: Saturdays, March 19 & 26  
Time: 6:30PM  
Fee: None  
Age: 10 years and up



### BIRD BANDING

Watch Mark Spreyer, a licensed bird bander, measure, weigh and record data about our resident and migratory birds. Birds are not caught in a predictable manner, so come prepared to hike the trails. With luck, you'll see a bird in the hand and two in the bush. If it is raining, the banding open house will be cancelled.

Dates: Sundays, April 3 & May 1  
Time: 9:00AM to Noon  
Fee: None



### FRIDAY NIGHT CAMPFIRE

Join us for stories and roasted marshmallows. Enjoy the night sounds of early spring by the crackling warmth of the campfire.

Date: Friday, April 8  
Time: 7:30 - 8:30 PM  
Suggested Donation: \$2.00



### CALLING VOLUNTEERS

Please help us keep the nature center functioning smoothly. Depending on the season, volunteer duties include clearing buckthorn, collecting seeds, planting trees, burning brush piles, and spreading chips on trails.

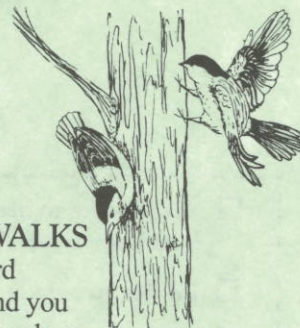
Stillman has the tools, we need healthy, outdoor-loving volunteers to wield them. Our workdays are scheduled on the second and fourth Friday of the month. Please remember to wear work gloves and clothes you don't mind getting muddy.

Questions? Call (847) 428-OWLS(6957) or email us at [stillnc@wildblue.net](mailto:stillnc@wildblue.net)

### BUILD YOUR OWN BIRD HOUSE

Many birds, including wrens, swallows, and chickadees, like to nest in tree cavities. You can increase the chances of attracting such birds by placing nest boxes in your yard. Join Jim Kaltsas and as he helps you assemble your own wren box. Feel free to drop in between the times listed and please bring your own hammer. Only one house per family, please.

Date: Sunday, April 10  
Time: 1:00 - 3:00  
Member's Fee: \$5.00/house kit  
Non-member's Fee: \$7.00/house kit



### SUNDAY MORNING BIRD WALKS

Mark Spreyer will lead a morning bird walk. Migration will be under way and you never know what we might find. Binoculars and field guides are a must. If you don't have any, don't worry, Stillman does. Please call 428-OWLS to make reservations.

Date: Sundays, April 17 & May 22  
Time: 8:00AM  
Fee: None  
Age: 8 years and up

### WILDFLOWER WALKS

Join us as we explore Stillman's woodlands in search of ephemeral beauties such as white trillium, may-apple, Virginia bluebell and jack-in-the-pulpit. Bring your camera!

Dates: Sundays, May 1 & 8  
Time: 2:00PM  
Age: 10 years and up  
Fee: None



### DON'T MISS RAPTOR SUNDAY!

Now's your chance to meet the great horned, barn, and screech owls plus a peregrine falcon, red-shouldered and broad-winged hawks. We will bring the birds out so you can see them up close. Kids will have a chance to dissect owl pellets. Bring a camera and a friend! Drop by anytime between 1:00 and 3:00 in the afternoon.

Date: Sunday, May 15  
Time: 1:00 - 3:00 PM  
Fee: \$5/car



Please note that Stillman Nature Center is available, by reservation, during the week to school classes, Audubon chapters, garden clubs, and other organized groups. For a brochure that describes the programs and fees, just call (847) 428-OWLS or visit our website: [stillmannnc.org](http://stillmannnc.org).



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*If you aren't already a member, please consider joining us.*

- ☐ Yes, I'd like to become or continue as a member of the Stillman Nature Center.  
I enclose my tax deductible contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_.
- ☐ I'd like to help as a volunteer with programs or land management at the Stillman Nature Center, please call me.
- ☐ Please send a gift membership from \_\_\_\_\_ to the name and address listed below.

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